



Base Realignment and Closure

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Fort Sam Houston on time, on target for 2011 BRAC finish

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BRAC is no longer a four-letter word around San Antonio, and especially at Fort Sam Houston. With one year to go, all signs point to all the Base Realignment and Closure-related projects on post coming in on time and on target.

San Antonio and post officials gathered at the Medical Education and Training Campus Sept. 15 to mark the 365-day countdown to when all San Antonio BRAC actions must be completed. The latest round of BRAC actions became law Nov. 9, 2005 and must be completed by Sept. 15, 2011.

Of the 200 BRAC recommendations enacted into law, bases in San Antonio were affected by 19, the most of any city in the nation.

“In this round, we are affected by 19 separate actions and the result will be a net growth, rather than a net loss,” said Mark Frye, chairman of the Legislative and Public Relations Committee of the San Antonio Military Transformation Task Force.

“Fort Sam Houston will grow by 12,500 jobs. About 4,500 of those are at METC as students – who will be drawing a paycheck, living on post and have liberty on weekends – and the rest are a combination of military and civilian.”

Looking back, there were those who predicted dire consequences when the first round of BRAC actions in the 1990s saw the closure of the iconic Kelly Air Force Base.

“In 1995, we thought we were going to lose 28,000 jobs when Kelly closed,” Frye said. “But Port San Antonio, formerly Kelly USA, has been a tremendous success and of great economic value to the community.”

According to the San Antonio Joint Program Office, each trainee is a paid federal employee while they are in school on Fort Sam Houston. Between all the San Antonio military installations, including Lackland and Randolph Air Force Bases, approximately 132,000 students will be trained here annually.

“Those people are going to have a great impact on our economy,” said Rear Adm. Bob Kiser, METC commandant. “They are going to spend money in town and bring in their

families. It's going to enhance San Antonio and bring an huge economic benefit to the city."

"We're all very excited about the boost that will be added to our local economy," Frye added. "Other impacts will be on the city's infrastructure, like at the Walters Street entrance to Fort Sam Houston. Walters Street is going to be widened to six lanes, and that will happen in the next 18 months. The city is making a tremendous investment in the infrastructure just to get people in and out of the base."

When the BRAC work is complete, Fort Sam Houston will be the largest medical training campus in the world and a premier medical complex, thanks to BRAC. METC features include a a medical instructional facility, housing for students and a dining room that can serve more than 4,000 people.

"Within five years, all of America's battlefield medics of the future will all have been trained in San Antonio," Kiser noted. Right now, we have about 200 students at METC studying to be X-ray technicians, biomedical repair technicians, pharmacy tech and dental lab folks. Eventually, we'll have a total of 1,500 faculty and 8,500 students here daily."

"San Antonio is known as Military City USA for a reason," Frye said. "We are considered to be one of the most military-friendly destinations in the country, if not the world. There were opportunities for all this to have gone elsewhere, but here at Fort Sam Houston, we had the post support and the infrastructure, such as Camp Bullis, to accommodate this."

"Each of the services had their own schoolhouses and they trained their people extremely well. We have an obligation here to provide world-class training to every enlisted medical person in the military," Kiser said of the joint nature of METC.

"When our people leave here, they are going to be working with medics and corpsmen and medical techs of all services. They're going to be able to work seamlessly with other services and know the lingo. It'll be a lot easier for them to interoperate in theater." With the countdown clock now running on BRAC, there are plans for formal recognition of other BRAC structures that are already in use.

A ribbon-cutting is scheduled in October for the Primary Care Clinic, which is taking over a portion of outpatient care responsibilities from Brooke Army Medical Center as it is expanded to absorb inpatient care services from Wilford Hall Medical Center.

In February 2011, a grand opening is planned for the Joint Center of Excellence for Battlefield Health and Trauma Research, which is adjacent to BAMC and has consolidated research programs from all service branches.